

## **Performative Objects**

Christian Hartard

[www.icaros.org](http://www.icaros.org)

The project investigates the production of aesthetic meaning as a collaborative practice. It develops a system of freely usable sculptural elements – ›performative objects‹ – as catalysts and analytical instruments of participatory situations.

### *Research questions and objectives*

The notion that a work of art is only completed in the gaze of the viewer is a well-known topos of reception aesthetics. The authoritarian figure of the artist who creates his or her work autonomously and materially unchangeable, however, is not fundamentally affected by this idea. The research project is guided by the conviction that art can increase its capacities for innovation and enrich itself with complexity if it offers artistic forms that break open this mode and shift the participation of the recipients in the direction of an actual co-production that is visible in the work itself. For this, the project uses the term ›political form‹. It aims to *demonstrate empirically and to analyse theoretically how and with which aesthetic, epistemological and social consequences such a joint, networked creation of meaning can succeed.*

### *Methods*

To this end, it develops, in a first phase, an extensive set of ›performative objects‹: three-dimensional, modular elements that might freely be copied, used, moved, combined, and rearranged without any directives from the artist. In a second, collaborative phase, this potential will be practically tested and documented in workshops (research cells) with partners from different disciplines such as fine arts, design, dance, architecture, or social sciences who are invited to interact, in their individual approach, with the performative material I provide for. Participatory observation and qualitative in-depth interviews will reflect on the question: *How do ›performative objects‹ function as catalysts for sculptural acts, and which parameters guide the aesthetic decisions in this process?*

### *Theoretical framework*

The project operates from a praxeological perspective. Important impulses are given by theoretical proposals which discuss aesthetic meaning as the result of practical processes and emphasise the embodiment of aesthetic experience, as well as by concepts that situate objects as social agents in an interdependent network of actions, like the actor-network theory, the idea of quasi-objects, boundary objects, or the affordance of things.

### *Level of innovation*

In combining theoretical framing, artistic practice, and empirical control, the project pursues three complementary objectives. (1) It develops and tests an innovative object-based research methodology for instigating and analysing the production of aesthetic meaning. (2) It provides fundamental insights into the process of multiple authorship and (3) poses programmatic questions on an alternative economy of art and on the emancipative potential, but also the possibly exclusive mechanisms of participatory practice.

The project unfolds in four interrelated modules: The ongoing artistic work on ›performative objects‹ (STUDIO) and the corresponding theoretical analyses (SENSOR), which will be documented on the website [icaros.org](http://icaros.org) in the form of an (object) index and a (text) archive; a series of explorative workshops with invited participants, the results of which will be made public, if possible, as exhibitions, performances, or lectures (LABORATORIES); and a scientific colloquium with international guests (PLATFORM).